MacKAY · FERREIRA · LANDINI · TARTAGLIA
STRANGE
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MARVEL
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LGY#424

STRANGE

PREVIOUSLY...

Doctor Stephen Strange was dead! And his wife, Clea Strange, took up the mantle of Earth's Sorcerer Supreme in his stead!

She has had to contend with two new threats: the Blasphemy Cartel–a gang of ruthless mystics consolidating control over New York's magical underworld by resurrecting dead superhumans, also called Revenants...and the Harvestman, Death's Sorcerer Supreme, who has been hunting these monsters.

Little did anyone realize that the Harvestman was actually Stephen Strange! Now, in order to free Stephen from his contract with Death and to stop the Cartel, Clea returns to the Sanctum Sanctorum to plan her next move...

"Ghost Stories"

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DOCTOR STRANGE CREATED BY STAN LEE & STEVE DITKO

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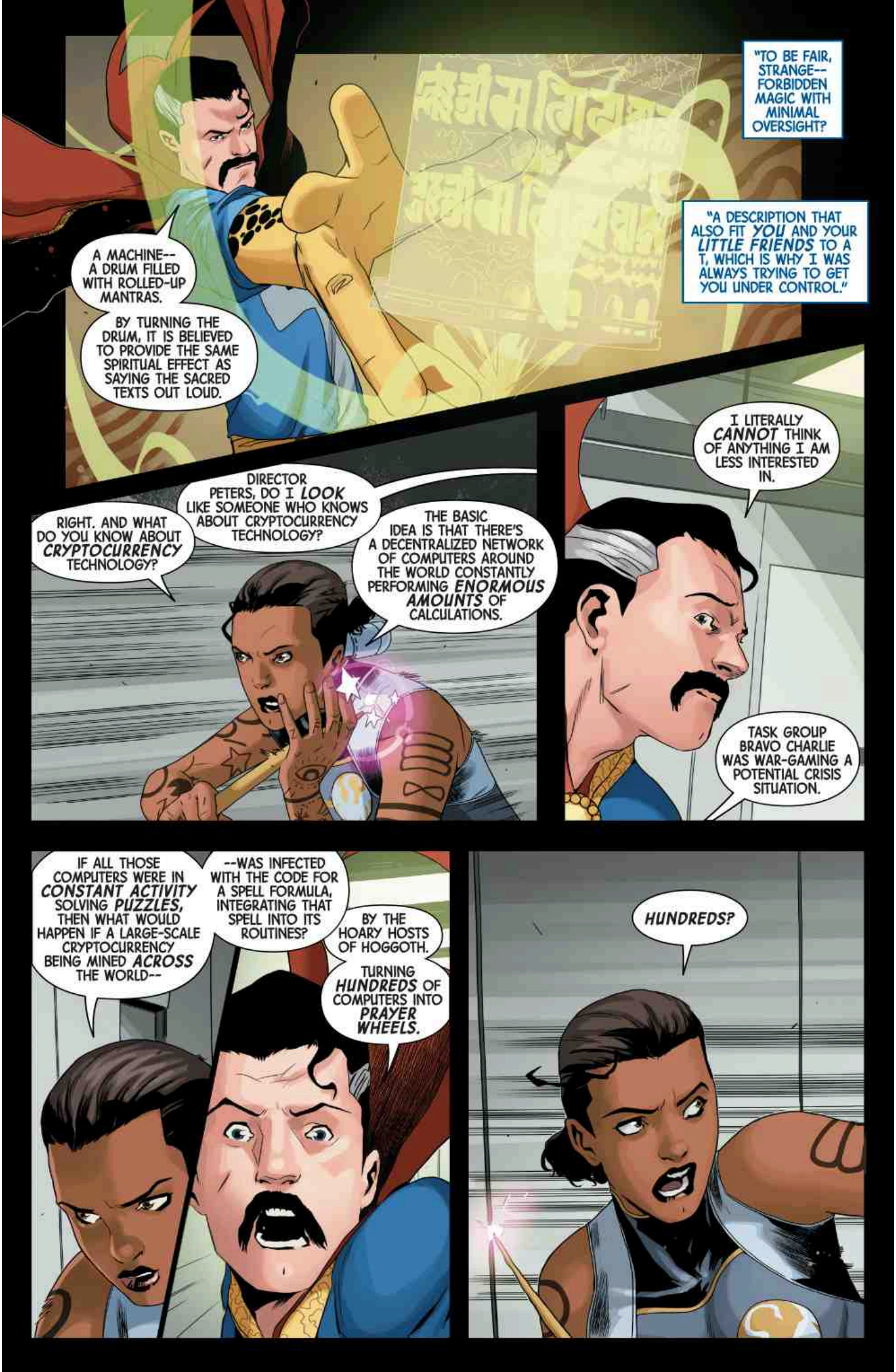
DR. STEPHEN STRANGE IS THE HARVESTMAN, THE SORCERER SUPREME OF DEATH.
AND HE HAS FINALLY COME HOME.
IT IS A MOMENT OF JOY IN A TIME WHEN THERE HAVE BEEN PRECIOUS FEW.
THE ONES WHO LOVE HIM HAVE BEEN GRANTED THE UNTHINKABLE.
THE OPPORTUNITY TO CLASP HANDS WITH THE DEAD...TO TAKE A FRIEND STOLEN FROM LIFE IN THEIR ARMS ONCE AGAIN.
THE ONES WHO LOVE HIM HAVE BEEN GRANTED THE UNTHINKABLE...
...SAVE FOR ONE.

FOR THE SORCERER SUPREME IS OF LIFE...
...AND THE HARVESTMAN BELONGS TO DEATH.
IF THOSE OPPOSITE ENERGIES, EACH ANATHEMA TO ONE ANOTHER, WERE TO TOUCH, TO COME IN CONTACT...
...THE BAREST BRUSH OF LIPS ON LIPS, ONE HAND FURTIVELY SEEKING THE ONE IT FIT BEST IN...
...THE RESULT WOULD BE CATASTROPHE.
FURTHER JOYOUS REUNIONS WILL HAVE TO WAIT, I FEAR.
WONG.
PLEASE TELL ME WHO THIS IS YOU'VE INVITED TO OUR WAR COUNCIL. FOR MAKE NO MISTAKE--
--WE ARE AT WAR.
MY APOLOGIES, CLEA. THIS IS--

PANDORA PETERS, DIRECTOR OF W.A.N.D.*--
--CALLING FOR DOCTOR STEPHEN STRANGE!
TWO YEARS AGO. W.A.N.D. POST-VITAL PRISON SITE "BIGBOX."
*S.H.I.E.L.D.'S WIZARDRY, ALCHEMY, NECROMANCY DIVISION.
STRANGE!
W.A.N.D. EMERGENCY LINE
STRANGE, ANSWER THE CRYSTAL BALL, DAMN YOU!
I KNOW YOU KNOW I HAVE AGENTS SURVEILLING YOUR HOUSE, SO YOU KNOW I KNOW YOU'RE HOME!
→SIGH←
W.A.N.D. EMERGENCY LINE

YES, DIRECTOR PETERS? WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?
WE'VE GOT A SITUATION AT BIGBOX, STRANGE!
IS THAT NOT NORMAL? YOU ARE, OF COURSE, IN A DANGEROUS LINE OF WORK.
YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE ME SAY IT, AREN'T YOU?
NO ONE CAN MAKE YOU SAY ANYTHING, DIRECTOR PETERS.
THIS IS BECAUSE OF THAT THING IN HOBOKEN.
A "THING" IN HOBOKEN?
YOU GOT AN OFFICIAL, FORMAL APOLOGY! FROM S.H.I.E.L.D. AND EVERYTHING! ON STATIONARY!
AH. BUT I DIDN'T RECEIVE AN APOLOGY FROM W.A.N.D., AND I DIDN'T RECEIVE AN APOLOGY FROM THE COMMANDING OFFICER ON THE HOBOKEN INCIDENT...YOU.
RRRRRRRR...

FINE.
I'M SORRY WE STAGED A MINDLESS ONE ATTACK IN HOBOKEN SO WE COULD PUT LISTENING DEVICES IN YOUR SANCTUM--
APOLOGY ACCEPTED!
"THE THING TO UNDERSTAND, CLEA, IS THAT PROFESSIONALLY, PANDORA AND I MORE OR LESS HATED ONE ANOTHER.
WHAT ARE WE LOOKING AT, DIRECTOR PETERS?
CLASS-THREE ROGUE ANIMATION INCIDENT.
"SHE REPRESENTED A CLANDESTINE ORGANIZATION USING FORBIDDEN MAGICS TO FURTHER AN UNCLEAR MANDATE WITH MINIMAL OVERSIGHT.
"BUT PERSONALLY, I ALWAYS RATHER LIKED PANDORA."
ONE OF OUR TASK GROUPS HAS BEEN RUNNING A HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIO, A KIND OF WAR GAME TO TRY SOMETHING NEW.
THIRTY-SEVEN MINUTES AGO, THAT TURNED INTO SOMETHING EXTREMELY LESS HYPOTHETICAL.
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT TIBETAN PRAYER WHEELS, STRANGE?


"TO BE FAIR, STRANGE-- FORBIDDEN MAGIC WITH MINIMAL OVERSIGHT?
"A DESCRIPTION THAT ALSO FIT YOU AND YOUR LITTLE FRIENDS TO A T, WHICH IS WHY I WAS ALWAYS TRYING TO GET YOU UNDER CONTROL."
A MACHINE-- A DRUM FILLED WITH ROLLED-UP MANTRAS.
BY TURNING THE DRUM, IT IS BELIEVED TO PROVIDE THE SAME SPIRITUAL EFFECT AS SAYING THE SACRED TEXTS OUT LOUD.
I LITERALLY CANNOT THINK OF ANYTHING I AM LESS INTERESTED IN.
TASK GROUP BRAVO CHARLIE WAS WAR-GAMING A POTENTIAL CRISIS SITUATION.
DIRECTOR PETERS, DO I LOOK LIKE SOMEONE WHO KNOWS ABOUT CRYPTOCURRENCY TECHNOLOGY?
RIGHT. AND WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT CRYPTOCURRENCY TECHNOLOGY?
THE BASIC IDEA IS THAT THERE'S A DECENTRALIZED NETWORK OF COMPUTERS AROUND THE WORLD CONSTANTLY PERFORMING ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF CALCULATIONS.
IF ALL THOSE COMPUTERS WERE IN CONSTANT ACTIVITY SOLVING PUZZLES, THEN WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF A LARGE-SCALE CRYPTOCURRENCY BEING MINED ACROSS THE WORLD--
--WAS INFECTED WITH THE CODE FOR A SPELL FORMULA, INTEGRATING THAT SPELL INTO ITS ROUTINES?
BY THE HOARY HOSTS OF HOGGOTH.
TURNING HUNDREDS OF COMPUTERS INTO PRAYER WHEELS.
HUNDREDS?

YOU'RE OFF BY A FEW ORDERS OF MAGNITUDE, DOC.
TASK GROUP BRAVO CHARLIE'S EXPERIMENT ACCIDENTALLY WENT *LIVE*.
THEIR *SEANCE SPELL* SPREAD ACROSS A WIDE BLOCKCHAIN NETWORK AND NOW *EVERY PRISONER HERE* IS AN *UNDEAD MONSTER*, POSSESSED BY SCREAMING-MAD GHOSTS.

"BIGBOX WAS A PRISON SITE FOR *POST-VITAL* DETAINEES.
"*DEAD MAGICIANS*, IN PLAIN ENGLISH. AS I'M SURE YOU'RE AWARE, YOUR TYPE HAVE A NASTY HABIT OF COMING BACK TO LIFE.
"CASE IN POINT.
"SO, AS A PRECAUTION, W.A.N.D. KEPT THEIR BODIES ON ICE AT BIGBOX. ONTOLOGICAL TERRORISTS, ONEIROTYRANTS, PYROCLASTIC EXTREMISTS...WHEN THEY ENDED UP DEAD, THEY ENDED UP AT BIGBOX.
"WHICH SUITED BRAVO CHARLIE'S RUNAWAY EXPERIMENT JUST *FINE*."

DIRECTOR PETERS, YOU NEED TO PULL YOUR PEOPLE OUT NOW.
YOU GOT A PLAN, DOC?
YES. I'M GOING TO ACTIVATE BIGBOX'S FAIL-SAFE.
HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT?!
YOU AREN'T THE ONLY ONE KEEPING AN EYE ON THINGS, DIRECTOR PETERS.

FINE. TAKE THIS COMMUNICATION CRYSTAL.
GOD, THIS IS GOING TO BE A BUDGETARY DISASTER.
THIS IS DIRECTOR PANDORA PETERS TO W.A.N.D. COMMAND/EMERALD CITY!
IMMEDIATE EMERGENCY SUMMONING FOR ALL W.A.N.D. PERSONNEL NOW!
GOOD LUCK, STRANGE.
POOF
LUCK?
PFFT.
I AM A DOCTOR-- SKILL IS ALL I NEED.
SHIELD OF THE SERAPHIM!

"BIGBOX'S FAIL-SAFE WAS, LIKE MOST OF W.A.N.D.'S TOYS, A MIX OF THE MAGICAL AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL.
"SURROUNDED BY THESE CREATURES, I WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO ACCESS IT MYSELF, THE SWITCH BEING IN THE SECURITY OFFICE THREE FLOORS AWAY...
"...BUT IF I WERE TO SPEAK TO IT THROUGH THE COMMUNICATION CRYSTAL..."

"I SUBLIMATED MYSELF INTO AN ALTERNATE LAYER OF REALITY, WALKING IN TWO WORLDS, WHERE I COULD HEAR THE SINGING OF THE MAGICAL SYSTEMS THAT RAN BIGBOX.
"I SPOKE TO IT, COAXED, CAJOLED, COMFORTED THE RUDIMENTARY CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE FAIL-SAFE SYSTEM.
"WE CAME TO AN AGREEMENT.

"IT ACTIVATED...
"...AND WAS GONE.
"WHERE ITS PRISONERS COULDN'T HURT ANYONE."

LATER.
W.A.N.D. HEADQUARTERS.
CODENAME "EMERALD CITY."
...DID I NOT FIX YOUR PROBLEM?
YEAH, YEAH, YOU DID.
IT'S JUST... BIGBOX WAS AN EXTREMELY EXPENSIVE FACILITY. AND I'VE GOT THE MAGIC GEESE PULLING DOUBLE DUTY LAYING GOLDEN EGGS AS IT IS.

AND YOUR TASK GROUP?
BRAVO CHARLIE?
THEY'RE SITTING UNCOMFORTABLY ON MY NAUGHTY LIST.

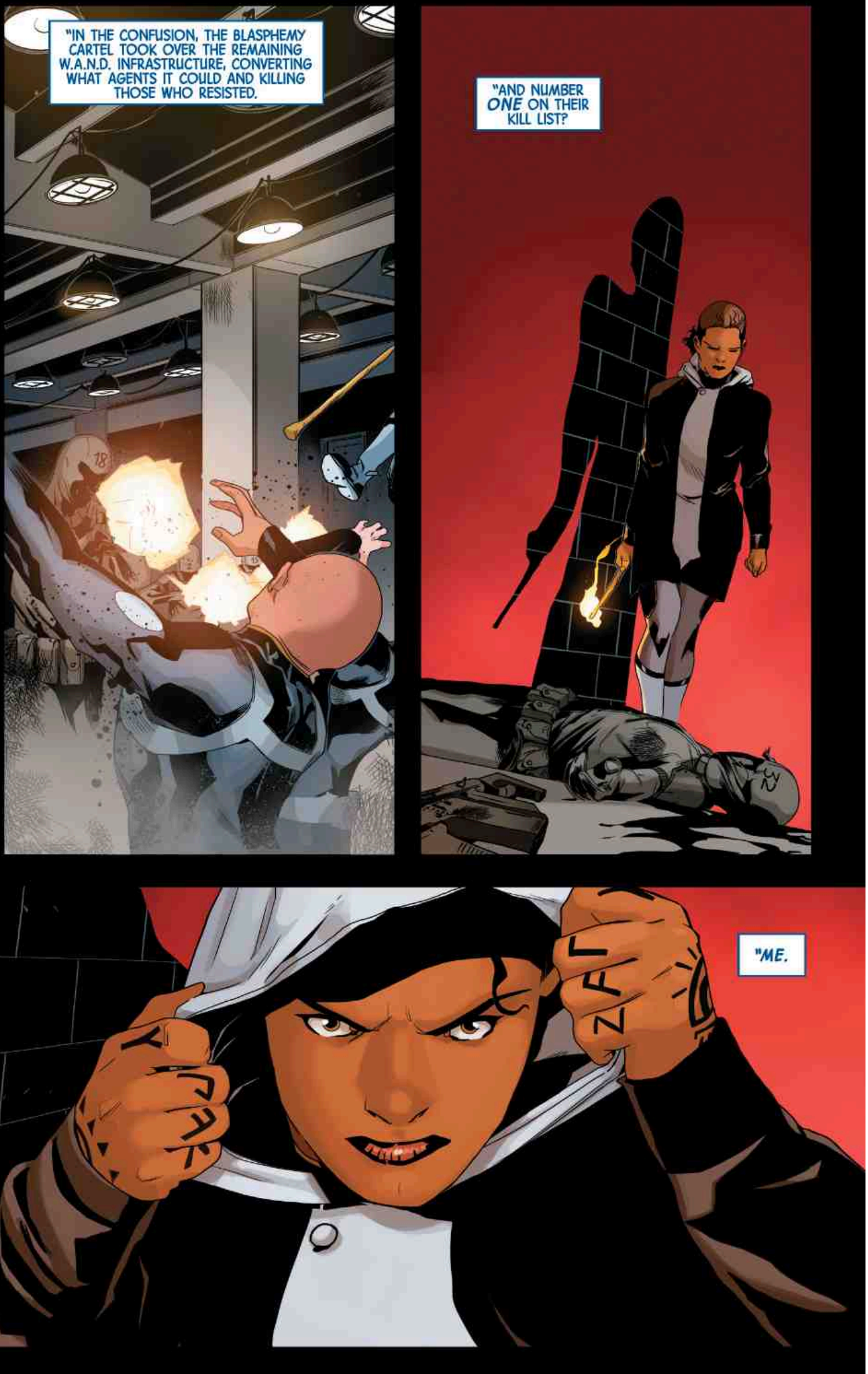
WHICH IS WHY THEY'RE ON CLEANUP DUTY IN THE PEGASUS STABLES!
SO GO ON! GET!

YES, DIRECTOR PETERS.
TASK GROUP "BLASPHEMY CARTEL"
TASK GROUP "BLASPHEMY CARTEL"

RIGHT AWAY.
"WAIT.
"WHY CAN'T I REMEMBER THE AGENT'S *FACE?*"
"BECAUSE THAT AGENT WAS THE HEAD OF TASK GROUP *BRAVO CHARLIE.*
"NICKNAMED *'BLASPHEMY CARTEL.'*

"THE INCIDENT AT BIGBOX WASN'T AN ACCIDENT.
"IT WAS A TRIAL RUN.
"I FOUND THIS OUT LATER, AFTER IT ALL WENT DOWN.

"AFTER WE BEAT HYDRA, AFTER S.H.I.E.L.D. WAS DISSOLVED..."
*SEE SECRET EMPIRE! --DS
"...W.A.N.D. WAS SHUT DOWN AS WELL.
"WHICH WAS EXACTLY WHAT THE BLASPHEMY CARTEL WAS WAITING FOR.
"THEY USED AN I.M.D.--INCANTATION OF MASS DISTRACTION--STOLEN FROM THE W.A.N.D. VAULTS IN THE CHAOS AND CAST IT, USING THE POWER OF THEIR CORRUPTED BLOCKCHAIN SPELL-MILL SYSTEM.
"THE WORLD FORGOT THAT W.A.N.D. EVER EXISTED.
"AND THAT AGENT SACRIFICED HIS ENTIRE IDENTITY IN ORDER TO DO IT.
"THIS ISN'T A MATTER OF BREAKING AN AMNESIAC INCANTATION LIKE WONG DID. AS FAR AS THE UNIVERSE IS CONCERNED, THAT AGENT NEVER HAD A NAME BUT ONE--
"--DIRECTOR NONE OF THE BLASPHEMY CARTEL.


"IN THE CONFUSION, THE BLASPHEMY CARTEL TOOK OVER THE REMAINING W.A.N.D. INFRASTRUCTURE, CONVERTING WHAT AGENTS IT COULD AND KILLING THOSE WHO RESISTED.
"AND NUMBER *ONE* ON THEIR KILL LIST?
"ME.

"SO I HID WHERE THEY WOULDN'T DARE TO LOOK FOR ME.
"A WATERING HOLE FOR MAGICIANS OF ALL STRIPES.
"BUT THEN *YOU* HIT THE SCENE--RAN HEADFIRST INTO THE BLASPHEMY CARTEL *UNEXPECTEDLY.*"
"WHY NOT *STEPHEN?*"
"BECAUSE THE BLAPSHEMY CARTEL HAD FILES ON STRANGE, A COUPLE ACRES OF THEM.
"YEARS OF W.A.N.D. FAIL-SAFE PLANS AND COUNTERMEASURES FOR DEALING WITH THE SORCERER SUPREME...HOW TO ACT UNDER HIS NOSE.
"PLANS WRITTEN BY *ME.*
"YOU, THEY HAD NO PLAN FOR.
"DOOM, MORDO, DRUMM, MAXIMOFF, RASPUTINA, KAPLAN, EVEN *WONG*...THERE WERE CONTINGENCY PLANS IN PLACE IF ANY OF THEM SHOULD BECOME SORCERER SUPREME.
"THEY *NEVER* EXPECTED *YOU, CLEA STRANGE...*"

...THEY'RE CREATING THE REVENANTS THE SAME WAY THEY CREATED THEIR PROTOTYPES AT BIGBOX.
BUT I DON'T KNOW WHY.
BUT YOU DO KNOW SOMETHING, DON'T YOU, DIRECTOR PANDORA PETERS?
I DO.
I CAN SHOW YOU WHERE THEY'RE HEADQUARTERED.
I CAN GIVE YOU EMERALD CITY.
TO BE CONTINUED!

NEXT:

Follow the yellow brick road!

Variant by
Mark Chiarello

Clea is finally reunited with her husband, Stephen. But it's a bittersweet reunion as the Blasphemy Cartel unleash their deadliest weapon yet... What is it? More like, WHO is it?!

EMAIL US AT MHEROES@MARVEL.COM AND MARK "OKAY TO PRINT"!

ZONE